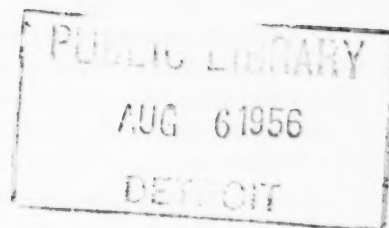


PHILOSOPHY,
RELIGION AND
EDUCATION

CHRISTIANITY and CRISIS



A Bi-Weekly Journal of Christian Opinion

The International Scene: Good Society or Class Struggle

In the prosperous and free societies of Northwest Europe, Canada, the United States and Australasia, fair opportunity is reasonably well set in traditions, institutions, and the economic factors which have made possible this happy condition. But there is great danger in several of these societies, not least in North America, that complacency and preoccupation with internal welfare may close the eyes of almost all citizens to the limited nature of this achievement. "Dynamic economy," private interests of great strength, full employment as assured policy, the extensive government activity which maintains wide-based opportunity by all the efforts of the welfare state; these combine in myopic economic nationalism.

There is less of economic integration on the international scale than in 1914, or at any rate than in 1930. Movements of labor and of capital across national boundaries have been radically reduced, and such fragmentary movements as remain are politically channeled, lessening the beneficial functions of a free market. International trade has declined, in ratio to the production and income of the world, limiting the advantages of regional specialization and exchange. The severe hindrances to trade arise from national interest, compelling in some instances and of dubious validity in others.

Attempts to restore convertibility of currencies and to remove quotas and discriminations make small headway, not only because of the general concentration on the immediate state of the internal economy, but because the tremendous predominance of the United States sets dollars at an impossible premium and necessitates protection against American mass production and dumping; and also because bilateral bargaining or group

preferences are presently desirable for those in weak positions. Moreover, American demands for universal equality of access to markets and to resources are the demands of the strong for the right to wreck or to dominate various industries and to acquire materials of major importance to countries in which they are found. And they come with negation of grace from the nation which arbitrarily protects the greatest single market in the world, capriciously directs its own massive buying, subsidizes and otherwise forces its own exports and communications, all with a bulk that makes and breaks the prosperity of nations.

Popular hopes have been built upon the visions and the advertising of three types of attack upon such problems:

(1) Various projects and organs of integration in Western Europe are significant in their possibilities, but not in their actualities. They affect so timidly such minor parts of the whole economic life even of the relatively favored few nations which share a great tradition, that the total experience to date is dismal. The Marshall Plan, its concomitants and its consequences, have helped mightily in necessary restoration of the various national economies. But of basic cooperation there is little, even in the face of Communist perils.

(2) The United Nations agencies and related undertakings, seeking to promote cooperation in trade, finance, labor policies, and social welfare, have received niggardly backing in domestic decisions and miserably trifling finance from the member governments. Their studies and their planning, their token achievements in international lending, have just the values implied in those terms. But economic nationalism goes forward with internal

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success in the most favored countries and wretched struggles in the less favored.

(3) Technical assistance and other aid to under-developed countries, like many of the foregoing measures, have had to claim overmuch and to publicize immoderately in order to win grudging support. They are valuable indicators of what *could* be done, cursed from the start by pathetic inadequacy, by the military and political hands of the United States and other self-interests, and, fundamentally, by the fact that they point inevitably to greatly needed enterprises which could go forward only with capital that is not in sight. Concerned observers have frequently denoted the assistance programs as conscience-covering substitutes for real cooperation in broad economic development, which would require decent tariff policies, significant international lending, and the like.

This is not the place to elaborate the cold-war factor in all these matters, the importance of the Communist sector in international economics, nor the abject mass poverty of much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America which urges upon them, with desperate intensity, action not congenial to our idealized picture of nineteenth-century development. Our aim is simply to point out that the goods of life-opportunity, which we enjoy in complacent and righteous prosperity as the elite among the nations, are held so closely within national walls as to endanger their persistence even in the strongholds. Meanwhile, before Christians and before all humane persons in these favored areas, there stands the challenge of the great majority who need, on the international scene, just the kind of democratic broadening in fresh opportunities which has done so much for the majority—indeed, for all—within each of the “developed” countries.

These meager statements are fully documented in the remarkable reports and papers of the United Nations Department of Social Affairs, and its Economic Commissions for Europe, for Asia and the Far East, and for Latin America. A first-class presentation in the impressive words of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe, formerly Minister of Commerce in Sweden and a philosophic social scientist of the highest standing, is Gunnar Myrdal's *An International Economy*.

The ultimate issue is the old one, already deter-

mined in essence for those within the garden city and its culture. What of the neighbor who does not enjoy such opportunities, but who sees them and contributes to them by his labor? Moreover, he is not able to buy our automobiles. The Marxian answer to the question is ready-made and is offered without reticence. The Christian answer, sociologically speaking, is given by American, Canadian, and similar citizens through their elected representatives and through those who manipulate economic and social capital. M. S. B.

AN INTOLERABLE INHIBITION

ELECTION TO public office presumably depends on gaining the favor of the voters. Even if, the morning after election, one has the distinct impression that the majority was dead wrong in its bestowal of favor, the outcome is to be accepted in the conviction that there is a fundamental rightness about the democratic process. But in a year when \$200,000,000 will be spent on campaigning—one or two TV programs costing what would have run an entire campaign fifty years ago—we should ponder an increasingly noticeable fly in the ointment.

No party or candidate can effectively seek the favor of the electorate without also enjoying the favor of those who will pay the bills. Gaining the approval of the voters and securing the requisite finances would be roughly two sides of a single undertaking, if campaign contributions were broadly based. But, in fact, ninety-five per cent of such funds are contributed by a small group of wealthy persons constituting one-half of one per cent of the electorate.

Granting the practical utility of soliciting money primarily from those who have it, and without even raising the question of overtly sinister potentialities, this may be seen as an unwholesome situation. It means that a prospective candidate without wealthy or special interest support is often prevented from becoming an actual candidate. It means that actual candidates must operate under the burden of an intolerable inhibition against alienating big contributors. Ultimately, it can lead only to a loss of respect for our political system and those whom it places in office.

These matters have been pointed out by the National Committee for an Effective Congress

in its *Congressional Report* (April 27), and they underscore the need for serious consideration of the proposals by Senator Neuberger and others for remedying the condition. A nationwide bipartisan fund-raising program, a full tax credit on contributions up to \$10, and—Theodore Roosevelt's idea—Government appropriations to the

parties have been suggested.

Anyone who agrees that the problem does merit serious consideration will also recognize the opportunity for direct action through his own contribution to the campaign funds of the party and the candidates whose policies he favors.

A. W. H.

Thoughts on Protestant Church Music

WILLIAM H. SCHEIDE

FOR A FAR longer time than any living man can remember the musical forces in the churches of the Western world have been essentially limited to choir and organ. In fact this has become one of the most sacrosanct of those modern ecclesiastical traditions which sometimes prove to have more vitality than biblical injunctions themselves (how many psalmists' exhortations are there to praise the Lord with trumpets, stringed and other instruments?). But we have a very set practice in this regard. The organ plays its most ambitious numbers when the congregation is entering or leaving (that is, at times when it cannot really be expected to concentrate on the music). During the service proper it serves, except for an occasional soft "meditation," as an accompanying instrument but during a choral response after a prayer it is likely to be silent.

Pius X: "Music Proper to the Church"

Thus, in surveying the general position of the organ in modern church services, one gets the impression that it occupies, on the whole, a secondary position. In fact, it seems unlikely that any Protestant would take exception to the following description of church music: "Although the music proper to the Church is purely vocal music, music with the accompaniment of the organ is also permitted." The original of these words appeared over the signature of St. Pius X as part of his encyclical *De Motu Proprio* issued in 1903. It is therefore quite possible that if the sainted Pontiff chose to contemplate the church music of Protestantism he would find much of it little more than a watered down version of music in his own church. I would like to ask the question: is that all that Protestantism has to offer in its musical heritage? Is there a musical counterpart of such doctrines

as the priesthood of the believer and the supremacy of the individual conscience to oppose the music espoused by St. Pius X?

What the Pope did in his encyclical was to adumbrate a certain kind of musical aesthetic. When he said ". . . the music proper to the Church is purely vocal music. ." he meant Gregorian Chant, that manifestation of the Patristic Age, as restored by the nineteenth century, and the work of Palestrina, expressing the fervor of the Council of Trent and the Counter Reformation. And this latter event was not mediated to him or to the world he addressed directly but again was due to nineteenth century revival. Palestrina was "rediscovered" by the Romantic Era just at the time when the musical world was becoming captivated by the power of the modern secular orchestra. The sensuous appeal of the rich orchestral lushness was so irresistible that even church organs followed the trend, and the end of this road is to be found in the theater organs and electronic instruments of today. Consequently the instinct of the time felt that religious music could be recognized best by renouncing so worldly an instrumentalism, and by singing the music of Palestrina with unaccompanied chorus, was convinced that it had found the answer.

But it was a change only of medium, not of style. For the performing style of the a cappella choruses was still the romantic, expressive ideal generated by the orchestra. So sovereign was this instinct over all music making that Richard Wagner could suggest an idealized a cappella chorus by means of the divided violins at the beginning of his opera *Lohengrin*.

Is unaccompanied choral singing really a "higher" art form than accompanied or instrumental music? Obviously this is unanswerable since the question deals with aesthetics, with judgments of taste. It is true that a choir of monks whose

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lips and face are moving in musical prayer can be an impressive spectacle. True to their vow of poverty they stand devoid of all musical instruments and *ad altare Dei* bring only themselves. And so different is Gregorian and even Palestrina melody from nineteenth century tunes that any listener would have good grounds for thinking that the singers had truly renounced "the world, the flesh and the devil."

In fact it would have been only natural for Pius X to feel that these two styles were the proper musical expression for that pervasive post-Tridentine spirit in the Roman Church which sets religion apart from life through the use of Latin, through celibate clergy, monastic orders, and the like. It is music of burning aspiration, congenial to mystical temperaments. But it is a Catholic mysticism, fitted for a church adorned with saints and angels. It is the singing of celestial beings in bliss, it is Goethe's "chorus mysticus," but one thing it is not. Just as in a baroque Catholic church with its endless saints and madonnas one wonders where God is to be found, so does this music, celestial though it be, remain the voice of human or anthropomorphically angelic beings. They are the angels surrounding Raphael's madonnas but they can never become God. Nevertheless, following Catholic practice, they mediate God. To the nineteenth century this mediation is accomplished by simple renunciation, by the shedding of every scrap of contemporary musical clothing (except the expressive delivery). For, said Pius, sacred music, to be "holy," must "exclude all that is profane" and in particular must "be free from reminiscences of motifs adopted in the theaters, and be not fashioned, even in . . . external forms, after the manner of profane pieces. . . The theatrical style . . . of its very nature is diametrically opposed to . . . good sacred music."

The Untraditional Traditional Instrument

Though Pius allowed organ accompaniment as long as it "merely sustained and never oppressed" the singing, he forbade "long preludes" or interruptions to the choral music. Neither did he allow pianos or "noisy or frivolous instruments such as drums, cymbals,¹ bells and the like," and "it is strictly forbidden to have bands play in church," though if he had consulted some of the manuscripts on the shelves of his library he would have found innumerable representations of medieval clerics

¹ cf. "Praise him with sounding cymbals, praise him with loud clashing cymbals"—Ps. 150:5.

playing instruments of exactly that kind. But at least the organ was retained, if only in a servile capacity. Though, properly speaking, it has no place in the Gregorian and Palestrina schools, not even the Pope could overlook the fact that it still enjoyed a long ecclesiastical tradition in its own right.

Yet the truth was that many of the organs of that time were not at all traditional but were frankly becoming imitators of the orchestra. This one instrument that was incidentally preserved as being supposedly traditional was no longer traditional, for what was really traditional about the organ was dead. When the organ undertook to imitate the orchestra it gave up its essential nature. That nature had been developed over many centuries and had won for the organ its place as the great church instrument *par excellence*.

It was awarded this eminence, not because it was the "king of instruments"—supposedly combining in itself all kinds of instruments as many nineteenth and twentieth century organs have tried to do—but because it was a basically different kind of instrument. Most other instruments can produce infinitely sensitive gradations of tone—this is the foundation of their music making. This ability gives to them a definitely human quality in that such things as their mournful sighs and throbbing ecstasies arouse particularly congenial responses in many human beings. But the ideal classic organ imparts none of this; its tone has always been unchanging, rigid and wholly impersonal. It does not and cannot discourse of human things; when it speaks, they disappear. It is the true counterpart in music of the elemental numinous experience—"I am that I am." Its speech can be truly biblical and anyone could see that, more than any other, this instrument belonged in the church.

Enter Johann Sebastian Bach

The most intensive cultivation that the organ probably ever received occurred in Protestant Germany following the ravages of the Thirty Years War. In fact it became the very center of the country's musical life. Every composer was steeped in it. Such was the situation when Italian opera (Pope Pius X's "theatrical music") invaded the land about 1700. For many decades it gained little foothold as such but with remarkable speed the Germans began adopting its forms (mainly recitative and aria) to their church music. For example, there were opera performances in Leipzig from

1693 to 1720. But then they ended, and nine years later the house was sold at public auction. However, arias and recitatives did not cease to be heard in Leipzig; they merely moved into the churches where they appeared as compositions of the local *Director Musices*, Johann Sebastian Bach, already of wide renown as an organist in a country that specialized in those musicians. Pius X might well have compared the "theatrical" opera arias of his eighteenth century Italian compatriots with Bach's cantata arias. How close they approach each other and yet what "a great gulf fixed" there is between them! As Philip Spitta, Bach's great biographer, puts it: "opera in Germany . . . developed into Bach's church music . . . by the complete purification² which it acquired by means of the national art of the organ. . . [It contained] the spirit of the time, in so far as it could find musical expression in operatic forms, and at the same time the genuine church style."

The spectacle presented here is one of extraordinary audacity and fascination. Here is spirit that with fearless and ruthless imperialism absorbs the whole world into itself and gives it forth revitalized with the soul of religion. It is not merely that Bach built secular forms such as concerto and recitative around ecclesiastical styles such as chorale and fugue. He moved in this perilous realm with a divine carelessness. An aria of Pallas praising Zephyr in a comic birthday serenade could become in his hands a New Year's greeting to Jesus with no fear of impropriety. Every instrument known to the composer praised God in church with uninhibited expression. No sounder virtuoso writing for those instruments has been produced in the more than two hundred years since Bach's death.

"A Uniquely Protestant Phenomenon"

In this tremendous art which encompasses and transfigures the world we have what seems to me a uniquely Protestant phenomenon. Religion does not remove itself from the world but operates upon it and in it. And the apparent ease of the conquest blinds one to the issues involved. Bach was able to master the secularism expressed by the new instrumental and operatic music only because he was so deeply rooted in the God of the ancient German organ tradition which reached its climax and end in him. Without that anchor he would have been swept away as most later church com-

posers have been, and the prohibitions of Pius X would have been justified.

Thus this classic triumph of Protestant art shows also the great difficulties and risks inherent in the Protestant attitude toward art and life. There is no more profound explanation than here of the pathetic and ridiculous spectacle it so often makes of itself. Protestant preachers are understandably fond of stressing the boldness and courage of their faith. But let them not be overly facile in this regard or the result may be little more than simple foolishness. (Definitely not the foolishness of God or of preaching about which Paul speaks).

The whole matter may be made more clear by recourse to Jesus' parable of the houses built on rock and sand. A church composer may indeed use the forms of the secular musical world—he may build a house—but what will he build it on, what is his foundation? What musical spiritual substance at the core of his being can he bring to work upon this material? For it must be refined "in a refiner's fire" before it can pass as the pure gold of true religious art. And that refining power must surely be present in the soul of the composer. That is the rock on which he builds his house. Without it the house is built on sand and its worthlessness is perceived by any close observer. That is why Pius X cried out against theatrical music in church, because, under the sheeps' clothing of religious words, he discerned the wolf-soul of "the world, the flesh and the devil." And the scandal and blasphemy of present day church music is the wide extent to which this is still to be seen.

Where then is the rock upon which a true modern church music might be built? I freely confess that on this point I am something of a pessimist—frankly I see nothing at all. I indeed hope that this is due solely to my own spiritual myopia. But when I consider the solidity of the rock upon which Bach built so vast a structure, the words "*credo in unum deum*" take on after his death a hollow ring; no one seems to know what they mean any more. In this situation the modern church composer has to work, and he is probably the happier the less he realizes it. For if Bach did truly "put on the whole armor of God" for his encounters with Luther's old friend the Devil, then that armor is evidently not so easily appropriated as a simple reading of those verses might make one think. Let us not be deceived for, like the foolish and bewitched Galatians, we are told that God, at any rate, is not mocked. But at least

² The original German word is "*Läuterung*" which also means "refining."

let us do what we can, let us live with the truth, in music as well as in scripture, not with one who withdrew from the world to find holiness, but with one who "in the fullness of time," armed with the organ-given power of God, went boldly into the world, represented by the whole gamut of its musical life, and brought all of it, as he might well have said, into subjection to the cross of Christ.

Church Music Today

But how can we thus live, given the average conditions prevailing in Protestant music today? Will an appearance of trumpets and drums in churches suddenly carry the day for Bach and his ideals? It would appear that many ministers of music have something of this hope in mind with their special performances of large works such as the *Christmas Oratorio* or the *B Minor Mass*. But, again, let no one be deceived; those works are heard as concerts, not as religious services. What is needed is to introduce Bach's habit and attitude of mind into the ordinary musical liturgy of modern Protestantism. It is Bach in every weekly service that is needed, not only on high feast days or special festivals. And there is a large body of music that, it seems to me, is ideally suited for this purpose. I refer to the simple four part chorales. These pieces require only the choir with the organ, though always present, merely doubling the voices. The chorales vary considerably in length but their average is too short and unpretentious for what is expected of a formal anthem. They should, therefore, first appear as responses and, if the choir, its director, the organist, the minister, the music committee, the congregation or some effective combination of these become fond enough of them, the service can be arranged to accommodate more. For example, they could very well alternate with Bible readings. The Bach chorales are classic miniatures of the religious life. They express that particular, basic piety on which his vocal church music is built. Here is the real rock because it is actually nothing more than pure organ music with words set under the four voice parts. Thus the organ becomes not an accompaniment to the choir but an equal partner.

Simplicity and Depth

Any church that lives with these chorales will experience a tremendous deepening in its faith. And it will be faith nurtured at the grassroots where it needs it most, in the ordinary worship habits of the congregation. A healthy sense of sin

with no trace of morbidity, the power and reach of the Christian hope, the central position of the cross and resurrection and the rest of Christianity's heart are revealed in the Bach chorales with a simplicity and depth that is unparalleled in Protestant music. It was originally music of the people. It could become so again.

It would be fruitless and visionary to imagine where a growth of this kind, once started, might lead. I have no desire to do it. Long ago, in speaking of Bach, the composer Robert Schumann remarked: "With him there is no end." I agree fully with that statement, no matter whether Bach be looked at from the side of religion or of art. It is the beginning, not the end, of the road that is of present importance. It is a road that may take its rise in the humblest ecclesiastical surroundings.

Any discourse such as this dealing with aesthetics and religion is forced to indulge in irrational statements and judgments. To those who do not respond to them they seem at least arbitrary, if not foolish. Yet if these people are concerned about religious matters they should not be too complacent. The words which Jesus repeated so often; "He that has ears to hear, let him hear," seem particularly apt when applied to religious music.

Music has been a faithful handmaiden of culture. Religious music gives a trustworthy index to the state of religion in the place and time of its origin. Whoever is satisfied with the prevailing style of religious music will be satisfied with modern religion because the two inevitably reflect each other and are products of the same spirit. Such an instinct will have no use for music from another era, it has no ears to hear it. Only those who are anxious to hear something different, who are listening for something to satisfy them more deeply than the customary, will respond.

CORRESPONDENCE

"Reward for our callousness"

To the Editors: Two passages in Reinhold Niebuhr's otherwise admirable editorial, "Yesterday's Anticipations and Today's Realities," in your issue of June 25 may warrant a brief word of comment. Toward the end the author summarizes the preceding argument in the words: "Thus, whether in China or in Russia, a creed which promised to make the poor rich has an advantage over the free nations because it can keep them poor and promise them wealth day after tomorrow." This may still be true of China, but it is no longer true of Russia, as attested by all travellers and all statistics: the standard of living is rising fairly rapidly.

It can so rise because Russian production is expanding at at least twice the American rate. This is a considerable achievement, but nothing astonishing in itself. In such Western countries as have to make up for war ravages like Russia, progress is no less rapid. And even more important, the industrially young country has the invaluable advantage of being able to skip all the intermediate stages of the industrial development, which the pioneering country had to explore and try out step by step, and of copying, without any essential inventiveness of its own, the most advanced techniques. Thus, there is room for both a rising standard in Russia itself and a growing margin of production for investment abroad.

What remains true is that without governmental interference the Russian people would consume more of their still modest annual output, would thus slow down the expansion of production, and from both ends diminish the funds available for foreign aid. The question whether it must be considered an inviolable principle of democracy to let the citizens decide on the rate of consumption, that is indirectly on the rate of expansion, has been debated for decades without conclusion; it is part of the famous problem of free government vs. good government.

In the preceding paragraph Dr. Niebuhr argues that democracy, because it must take even the inordinate desires of its citizens into account, is at a disadvantage in the competition with tyranny for help to poor countries, as the latter can afford to disregard even the most legitimate desires of its citizens. Maybe this "disadvantage" is more than just that, maybe it is just the reward for our callousness.

Dr. Niebuhr is aware of this, of course; he calls for enlightenment and "conscience." Let us spell that out. It all started last year when the Burmese were desperately trying to sell us their surplus rice and we politely explained to them that this would not be a normal commercial deal because we as a rich nation did not need their rice; it would be a pure act of charity, and they surely would not want charity. So the Russians moved in, bought the rice at a far higher price than we had termed adequate, and thus breached the wall of mistrust in the uncommitted countries.

At each turn of their game ever since the Russians used a new trick to confound us, and we did not do anything but warn the recipient countries that these offers of help without strings attached were deceptive—the Russians did not mean them unselfishly but as propagandistic means to increase their prestige and power, and a freedom-loving country would rather reject such dishonest proposals. The starving Burmese anyway did not mind the motives. For the fact of the matter is simply that the Russians did share their increasing but still modest wealth with other peoples poorer than they, and we increasingly demonstrate that we are none too eager to share our far greater wealth.

We may very well assume that God dislikes the Russian's actions for the bad motives behind them, but then what can he possibly think of our motives and actions?

EDUARD HEIMANN
New York, New York

Christian Imagery in "Waiting For Godot"

To the Editors: Thank you for printing an intelligent review of Samuel Beckett's play, "Waiting For Godot" (July 9). Mr. O'Gorman was right to say that this play "has revealed the critics in a state of intellectual dishabille." One wonders how anyone could so withdraw from everyday life that he would not immediately identify himself in these staged relationships of friend and friend, master and slave, man and man, and in the attitudes of humans towards God, Death, and "trivialities" such as clothes, smells, defecation. These are the farthest things from obscure abstraction, the nearest things to our own lives. That Beckett has pictured the confusions, the searchings, the anxiety and despair, the charity of men so well, so near to our personal, naked souls is one of the things that must confuse drama critics who are accustomed to dealing only in outer appearances and outer garments.

But Mr. O'Gorman offers no more help than the others in regard to the basic structure of the play. Only by an effort of will can a person avoid seeing that Beckett, though not committing himself to the Christian faith, has chosen to display and discuss life in a Christian context and with Christian imagery. From the first, Vladimir is haunted by some memory of the Bible. The opening dialogue of the two tramps culminates in a discussion of the "two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Saviour." They immediately turn to the cross-shaped tree where "We're waiting for Godot" and where there is "no more weeping." When one says, "Looks to me more like a bush," the other replies, "What are you insinuating- That we've come to the wrong place?" They are not to meet their Godot at the bush [of Moses?] but at the tree, the cross of Jesus Christ. And it is no less significant that the play ends with the tramps waiting at the foot of the same tree. In the meantime one has said, "All my life I've compared myself to him [Christ]" who lived where "they crucified quick." They twice discuss hanging themselves from the tree where Christ hung. When frightened they try to shelter under it, but this tree gives no concealment. The most awesome moment is when they learn that Godot, for whom they wait, might have a long white beard; the reply (from the liturgy): "Christ have mercy upon us."

With these plain statements and many more throughout the text it remains a mystery to me how every New York critic has refused to discuss it. So cryptic a writer as Beckett does not waste words, much less carefully reiterate what is unessential to his purpose. Do the critics really not recognize the most elementary Christian symbols

and Biblical references? If so, what of those 60% of all American adults who attend church on an average Sunday? What are they hearing and what are they saying that allows the Biblical message to remain completely unknown to intelligent observers? (Only 2% of all Englishmen worship each week, yet the London *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer discusses these things fully.) Or do the critics recognize all this and yet abstain from their duties of analysis for fear of seeming to take Christianity seriously? In which case the church certainly would stand in need of repentance for having withdrawn itself and its witness from such an important part of our nation's life, the theatre.

WESLEY M. STEVENS
New York, New York

"A terrible parable . . ."

To the Editors: . . . "Waiting for Godot" has been called a mirror which reflects what we bring to the play, and . . . I have been struck by the amount of Biblical symbolism in the play. . .

I am more and more convinced that Beckett is taking this symbolism seriously, and if not a Christian, he is possibly moving slowly towards a foundation for a Christian interpretation of life. One central theme is the theme of Didi's repentance. As the play opens he is not yet prepared to give up all hope in an earthly salvation. In response to Gogo's "Nothing to be done," he responds "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle." In a few moments he turns to Gogo and says "Suppose we repented," and follows on with an obviously more than passing concern with the fate of the two thieves, whether in fact one *had* repented, and if so, whether he had been saved.

Throughout the first act the tree is bare. However, in the second act it has a few green leaves on it, . . . only Didi sees the leaves. . . For his

eyes are beginning to open, and at the end, he finally cries out "I can't go on." He has finally come to recognize and to accept the ultimate impotence of merely human power to save man, and when he hears from the little boy that Godot has a white beard . . . he is ready to fall on his knees before the tree (the Cross?) and to cry out "Christ have mercy on us." Then he can exclaim "Everything's dead but the tree." The leaves make all the difference, but like everything else in the Christian faith they do not carry their meaning on the surface. . . "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees; as soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also when you see these things taking place, you know that the Kingdom of God is near." (Luke 21:29-31)

To me "Waiting for Godot" is a terrible parable on "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?," and it depends on how you react to that cry as to how you will react to the play. Beckett destroys every ground for ultimate trust in human hopes, and he has the honesty to paint life this way. If human hopes are all there are, man is truly, utterly forsaken, and the sooner he is stripped of his illusions the better. But if it is not so, then the ground of hope is no longer in ourselves but beyond us. To the first view, the leaves are just leaves, if they bother to see them at all. To the second they are the signs of summer, that the Kingdom of God is near. But only he who has repented, who has truly rejected ultimate trust in every human hope can read the signs and begin to discern something beyond. . .

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